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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000038

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SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER CLAIMS ERITREA TRAINING ARMED AFAR GROUPS

REF: a) 2008 DJIBOUTI 949

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Minister of Defense reports disaffected armed youths from Djibouti's Afar ethnic group have been recruited by the Eritrean Government, which is providing military training and plans to infiltrate them back into Djibouti. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Minister of Defense, Ougoureh Kifleh Ahmed, told the Ambassador January 6 that young ethnic Afar from northern Djibouti had been recruited by the Eritrean Government and were now receiving military training. These groups had previously conducted small-scale acts of banditry Djibouti's northern Tadjourah district. In early October, one band briefly occupied the remote town of Randa (which has no police or military presence) to requisition food and other supplies before disappearing again into the mountains (reftel). The Minister said that the GODJ had attempted to reach out to these youths through traditional Afar elders in the area, but the GSE pre-empted this effort by recruiting the youths for military training.

¶3. (C) According to the Minister, the GSE is conducting this training in the town of Kiloma, on the southeastern shore of the Bay of Assab. Approximately 200 Afars are undergoing the training, of whom approximately one-third are Djiboutian and the rest Ethiopian. He said the site is also being used by the GSE to train Somalis. The Minister expects the trainees to be infiltrated back into Djibouti, but said he has no indication that this has happened yet.

¶4. (C) Comment: Ougoureh Kifleh Ahmed is himself an Afar, and was the former Chief of Staff to the ethnic-Afar rebel group "Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy" (FRUD) before it signed a peace agreement and joined the government in the late 1990s. As a Djiboutian Afar, Kifleh may have an interest in portraying northern insecurity as instigated by foreigners (i.e., Eritrea) while playing down indigenous grievances within his own community. Nevertheless, this is the first time that a senior GODJ official has charged to us that the GSE is supporting an armed opposition force intended to infiltrate Djibouti. While we defer to Asmara for analysis of GSE motives and actions in the region, an attempt to create a small force to foment instability in a neighboring country would seem to us straight from the GSE playbook.
SWAN

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS/SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:cb39ef6b-a395-4385-9e